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ABSTRACT

A study, begun in 1996, was designed to examine policy regarding implementing curriculum reform across the nation at the state, district, and school levels. This report presents findings from phase two of the three-phase research project. The second and third phases of the research project focus, respectively, on district- and school-level efforts to implement reform. Two of these districts have large proportions of English Language Learners; two have populations of highly mobile students from families of migrant workers; and two have populations of students from families with incomes below the national poverty level. In the first two phases of this study, the influence of policy and practice at two systemic levels--state and district--was examined. The districts used different approaches to implement educational reform. As expected, because of the selection process, they have all engaged in extensive work to develop or adopt standards, assessments of standards, curriculum aligned with standards, and instructional development, particularly to fund the time and learning opportunities for teachers and administrators to understand reform goals and practices. Consistent, supportive leadership focused on the success of reforms, and was reported by district respondents as highly important to local implementation efforts. (Contains 15 references.) (DFR)

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District Approaches To Education Reform

The Laboratory Network Program's *Curriculum, Learning, and Instruction Project*

October 2000

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REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY NETWORK

District Approaches To Education Reform

The Laboratory Network Program's
Curriculum, Learning, and Instruction Project

October 2000

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THE LABORATORY NETWORK PROGRAM'S CURRICULUM, LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION PROJECT

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, supports a network of 10 regional educational laboratories across the United States. The laboratories work to ensure that those involved in education improvement at the local, state, and regional levels have access to the best available information from research and practice. This report is the result of a cross-laboratory effort being led by McREL as part of the Laboratory Network Program, a program that allows laboratories to collaborate on projects in greater depth and on a larger scale than they could do alone.

During the last decade, policies at the federal, state, and district levels designed to promote and support local education reform have been proposed and adopted. To examine the impact of education reform across a variety of state contexts, OERI funded the Curriculum, Learning, and Instruction Project, a collaborative project involving nine of the nation's regional educational laboratories. This study, begun in 1996, is designed to examine policy regarding implementing curriculum reform across the nation at the state, district, and school levels. This report presents findings from phase two of this three-phase research project.

The first phase of the project, which focused on state-level strategies, revealed important considerations for states implementing reform. During that phase, state officials were interviewed to identify reform policies and activities at the state level and to gain an understanding of each state's reform history and strategy. Five areas of state-level reform activities were examined (see Laboratory Network Program, 1998a, 1998b):

1. Standards
2. Assessments aligned with standards
3. Accountability systems to support student learning
4. Professional development for teacher learning
5. Resource allocation policies

The state-level investigation revealed that these activities require extensive time and effort to develop and implement. They also require long-term commitment to curriculum-based reform. Currently, states are working to align the components of education reform to focus systemic efforts around curricular goals. In addition, further research is being conducted to assess the extent to which state curriculum reform policies have an impact on school effectiveness and improved student achievement.

The second and third phases of the research project focus, respectively, on district- and school-level efforts to implement reform. The second phase of the project, the focus of this report, examined 16 districts in 13 states. Two of these districts have large populations of English Language Learners; two have populations of highly mobile students from families of migrant workers; and two

have large populations of students from families with incomes below the national poverty level. In addition, five districts are located in rural areas or small towns and face the challenges of geographic isolation and limited financial and human resources. Representatives from each district were interviewed to assess the district's reform path, perceptions of the state's role in that reform, and lessons learned as a result of the reform process.

In the first two phases of this study, the influence of policy and practice at two systemic levels — state and district — was examined. However, it is the school and classroom level of the education system that is most directly connected with students' experience and learning. In the next phase of this research project, 18 schools located in the districts included in phase two will be studied to examine how state and district policy play out at the school level. The schools selected for the next phase of this research are considered by the districts studied during phase two to be exemplary at implementing education reform.

STATE POLICY CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW

To understand the strategies and direction undertaken by the districts studied during phase two, it is important to consider the state policy context that inevitably influenced the districts studied. State standards-setting efforts, assessments, accountability requirements, support in the form of professional development opportunities, and resource allocation policies were reported to have influenced reform at the district level, either directly or indirectly. Note that this section does not review the policies of all 50 states as was done in phase one of this study (LNP, 1998a, 1998b), but rather, presents a snapshot of the 13 states represented by the districts studied during phase two.

Each of the states represented in phase two of this study has developed content standards documents, which districts are expected to either adopt or reference in their own standards-setting and curriculum development activities. Each of the states also has some form of state assessment associated with the standards, although assessments vary across states in terms of format and content tested. In each of the states studied, accountability policies exert pressure on district personnel to improve student achievement on state assessments, but *who* is held accountable and the stakes associated with performance vary. States also have taken a variety of approaches to supporting professional development and to allocating resources related to the changes required in these reforms.

Standards

Each of the 13 states represented in this phase of the study has developed and adopted a set of student learning goals or standards, many of which were introduced through legislative action. All of the states have standards in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, although these standards vary somewhat in terms of rigor and specificity (American Federation of Teachers, 1999; *Education Week*, 2000). Another source of variation is the degree to which the state's approach to district standards is prescriptive; local districts must adopt state standards or, in some states (e.g., California and Colorado), they may use state "model" standards as guides for developing their own standards.

Assessments

Two primary differences among state assessment programs are the number of academic disciplines tested and the complexity of the assessment format used (e.g., multiple choice items, short answer items, extended response items, and portfolio assessment). In the 1999 state sample included in this study, 12 states (all but Hawaii) have a state assessment that is reported to be aligned with language arts and mathematics standards. Seven states also assess students' learning in science and social studies. In terms of format, all of the states include extended-response items for language arts. However, only Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, and Missouri include extended-response items on their tests in other subject areas. One key issue relative to state-level assessments is how well aligned the assessments are with the state's standards. Several states (including Arkansas and California) are in transition as they develop new assessments and, in the interim, are using norm-referenced measures, such as the SAT-9 (*Education Week*, 1999).

Accountability

District respondents reported that in response to state accountability requirements and tests, district efforts have become more focused on student achievement. In Kentucky and Colorado, district representatives attributed increased teacher expectations of students to state assessments. Four districts (in Maryland, Nevada, and two in Oregon) reported that state development of secondary-level assessments has caused them to attend more closely to reform in secondary schools. In some cases, districts reported using disaggregated state assessment scores to help guide district and school improvement planning (i.e., Nashua, NH; San Francisco, CA; Douglas, NV; Shelby, MO; and Socorro, TX). However, at other sites, district representatives reported that state assessment information has not been useful for diagnostic purposes, either because reports have been released too late to benefit specific students or because only a subset of standards has been measured.

Accountability systems in the 13 states represented in this study have the following characteristics:

Report cards. All 13 states use school report cards. Report cards vary across states in terms of the types of information they contain.

School ratings. Eight states publicize school or district ratings.

Rewards for performance. Six states provide rewards based on school or district performance.

Assistance for poorly performing schools. Seven states provide assistance to low-performing schools or districts in the form of financial assistance or intensive attention from an educator recognized as having an understanding of education reform (e.g., Kentucky's Highly Skilled Educators).

Sanctions. Six states use schoolwide sanctions as a form of accountability. Under these policies, the states have the authority to close, take over, or reconstitute failing schools.

Student exit exam. Of the states included in this study, only Nevada currently uses standards-based achievement as a criterion for high school graduation, although at least three other states plan to implement a mandatory standards-based graduation exam in the next few years.

Professional Development

District respondents identified several state-initiated professional development opportunities that assist implementation efforts:

Professional development targeted to low-performing schools. One method of state-level assistance to low-performing schools is state-organized, intensive professional development. For example, Kentucky provides low-performing schools with the services of Distinguished Educators (now called Highly Skilled Educators) — practicing teachers and administrators who work with schools to improve student learning. States that have targeted, capacity-building assistance programs have reported high success in turning around many districts and schools (Laboratory Network Program, 1998b).

Standards-based materials, workshops, and conferences. Eight states developed materials and offer conferences or workshops to support instruction and assessment in standards-based education (Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, and Oregon). Maryland uses technology to disseminate important curricular and instructional information (see http://mdk12.org/). Colorado and Kentucky hold regular conferences to communicate important information to state educators about the standards-based system. Florida sponsors interactive teleconferences and workshops that focus on aligning curricula, instruction, and assessment with the Sunshine State Standards.

Regional professional development centers. Five states fund and support regional professional development centers: Florida, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, and Texas. In most of these states, the professional development centers are charged with providing training and assistance in education reform. In Nevada, centers also are required to assess the region's professional development needs. Two rural districts mentioned the utility of the regional professional development center's assistance. Regional centers are an especially useful resource because external assistance can be difficult to obtain and more expensive for rural sites (Apthorp & Arnold, 1999).

Policy requirements. District respondents reported that states influence professional development in two ways: (1) by setting a threshold for districts to invest in professional development (as is the case in Missouri, which requires districts to invest at least 1% of the total budget in professional development), and (2) by issuing waivers for other requirements, as in Arkansas, where the Batesville district received permission to spend five contract days on professional development.

Resource Allocation

Several different aspects of state-level resource allocation were mentioned by district respondents. For instance, respondents in four states indicated that state policies to equalize funding across districts have affected their activities, with mixed effects depending on the district. In Texas, Kentucky, and Michigan, reporting districts saw increased amounts of funding; in Oregon, state funds diminished after the policy was put into effect. In addition, eight districts in the sample mentioned that flexible federal monies (e.g., Goals 2000 or Eisenhower grants) have helped fund their reform activities. Other districts reported that a variety of state-supported initiatives (e.g., technology initiatives, year-round schooling, literacy initiatives, assistance in pooling resource streams) were helpful.

STUDY METHODS

The methods for this phase of the study were developed by the cross-laboratory project team in a series of meetings during 1998–1999. This report is a summary of the information from 13 case study reports, one for each district, that were prepared by team members based on interviews and data from the districts. Each case study report consists of qualitative data from interviews and qualitative and quantitative data from state and district sources, such as test scores and district report cards.

SAMPLE

Sixteen districts were selected for study in 13 states (Laboratory Network Program, 1998a, 1998b), in which state approaches to reform were documented. Findings were organized around four major themes: standards, professional development, assessment of standards, and accountability systems. Districts were nominated for the phase two study by state education department staff members and regional educational laboratory staff members on the basis of having high student achievement and facing at least one challenge, such as high transiency rates or large numbers of English Language Learners. The districts also were selected to represent different geographic contexts of urban, rural or small town, and suburban across the sample. Accessibility for project teams and willingness to participate were the final criteria used in the selection. District demographic information is provided in the appendix.

DATA COLLECTION

Twelve project team members from the participating laboratories collaboratively developed protocols for interviews and lists of data to request from the districts studied. They conducted site visits individually or in pairs and wrote the case studies. Two to nine interviews were conducted in each district; on average, four interviews were conducted per district. Those interviewed include the district superintendent (or designated assistant or deputy superintendent) and other staff and personnel identified as instrumental in the district's reform efforts. Interviews were conducted if possible with district-level staff responsible for curriculum and instruction, the director of assessment, and the director of research and evaluation. Additionally, across the sample, interviews were conducted with principals, supervisors of elementary or secondary education, school board

members, directors of staff development, directors of human resources or personnel, a school renewal specialist, a coordinator of a district multimedia resources, and curriculum-area specialists.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Project staff members developed a framework to guide the writing of the case study reports. The case reports were circulated among team members and revised as necessary for clarity. Case studies were analyzed for similarities across the major areas of activities (listed in Table 1). Data were summarized across respondents in each activity area using narratives and supplemented with district-level data (e.g., test scores).

Table 1
Major District Reform Activities and Definitions

District Activity	Description
Developing Standards and Curricula	District activities related to identifying, creating, and officially adopting standards and aligned curriculum
Assessing Students' Progress and Using Assessment Data	District activities related to assessing students' progress in meeting content and performance standards, reporting assessment information to teachers, schools, and districts, and helping stakeholders use assessment data
Improving Instruction	District activities focused on improving instruction, including offering professional development from internal and external sources, and changing district policies and structures to support high-quality instruction, including working with preservice education institutions
Developing Leadership and Strengthening Organizational Culture	District activities focused on developing leadership and strengthening management structures
Allocating and Using Resources	District activities related to the securing, allocating, managing, and using financial capital

STUDY FINDINGS

The education reforms described in this report deal with high expectations of achievement articulated as standards; new achievement tests reflecting the standards; and an aligned system of curriculum, instruction, professional development, preservice programs, resources, and accountability measures that support high achievement. In the subsections that follow, each of the district activities identified in Table 1 is described and illustrated with examples from the study's sites.

DEVELOPING STANDARDS AND CURRICULA

- *Most districts adopted state standards with few or no modifications, although some developed local standards documents.*
- *Districts that had developed standards before state efforts were completed worked to align their efforts with a variety of documents, including subsequently developed state standards.*
- *Curricular alignment activities were important ways to build understanding about the reform, and these activities were frequently driven by state assessment programs.*

In general, districts have followed the lead of states' standards-setting activities. Nine districts have adopted state standards. Seven have worked to develop, revise, and align their local standards documents to those of the state or to other documents, including state assessments. However, most districts already had been working on outcomes or standards-based goal statements prior to state legislation. Depending on the state policy approach to standards, districts then revised or redirected their efforts. For instance, the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 put forth Kentucky Learning Goals and Academic Expectations, which districts were required to adopt. Districts also were required to create curriculum frameworks aligned with the goals. Colorado has state "model" standards and districts must develop local standards that meet or exceed the state model content standards.

Some districts took a proactive approach to standards setting and then worked to align their early work with state documents. An example is the Thompson Valley District in Colorado. According to district representatives, the district standards-based approach has been at least three years ahead of the state's standards system. District respondents said that the standards-based approach was not adopted in response to state requirements, but that once state policy evolved, district personnel worked to align their earlier work, which had entailed the development of a certified diploma and a teacher evaluation system, with the state's goals. Respondents reported that the flexibility of the state's approach to standards-setting meant that the district's earlier efforts could be incorporated into later policy.

The Nashua, NH, school district took a similar approach. The district, which began reviewing standards and curricula in 1992, had used a variety of external sources (e.g., national standards, other curriculum projects, and the SCANS report) to inform local efforts. When the New Hampshire State Frameworks were created, the district merged the state standards into local documents by conducting a comprehensive curriculum/standards review and alignment process.

In California, the San Francisco district did not wait for the state to take the lead in developing standards. In 1995, the district began the process of developing content and performance standards in a variety of subject areas. As standards were developed, implementation activities included alignment of the district's core curriculum with the standards, development of model

lessons and activities to support implementation in classrooms, purchase of instructional materials, and development of technology-based classroom supports.

For many districts, curriculum alignment and articulation activities not only ensured that their efforts were synchronized with those of the state, but also helped build understanding about standards-based education and about district focus. For instance, the Oldham County, KY, school district adopted a standards-based curriculum development approach that involved all faculty in creating exit standards for each grade and in each content area. District representatives considered this a successful approach to actively engaging faculty in professional development around reform. In Salem-Keizer, OR, high schools have created Vertical Articulation Teams across grade levels to coordinate curricula so that students meet state benchmarks. Respondents from the Harford County, MD, district reported that aligning the curriculum with state exit outcomes is the most important thing the district has done to improve student achievement.

Douglas County, NV, has been involved in an extensive, ongoing process of examining the alignment among curriculum, assessments, and statements of student knowledge. Initially, the district worked from exit (graduation) competencies developed for core academic skills in 1995. A study of the alignment between curriculum and graduation competencies was conducted the following year, but with the 1997 enactment of the state standards act (Nevada Education Reform Act [NERA]), it was necessary to examine the alignment between district competencies and state standards. District representatives reported that district competencies are closely aligned and, in most cases, meet or exceed the state content standards.

In summary, the districts in this sample adopted standards that conformed to state and national standards documents. These districts also reported that curriculum alignment activities were effective measures for enhancing shared teacher knowledge and understanding of standards.

Assessing Students' Progress and Using Assessment Data

- *In some cases, state assessments and accountability policies have provided a focus for district alignment efforts.*
- *It is important to assess the extent of alignment between assessments and standards.*
- *Monitoring student achievement data is important to assess progress toward goals and document district successes.*

In some instances, state approaches to accountability and assessment have provided districts with a focus for their efforts. For example, in Harford County, MD, district personnel reported that they had worked on reform since 1990. At one time, the district focused on performance assessment in the classroom, but teachers did not support the effort and it was discontinued. At another point, some schools in the district used McREL's Dimensions of Learning materials to analyze school climate issues. State graduation requirements, effective in 2005, provided a new focus. The state

policy push has led to the alignment of high school curricula with the state's core high school learning goals, an exercise reported by respondents as the best thing they could have done for student achievement. At other sites, districts have adopted state measures of student performance as their own and attached consequences to performance. This is the case in Reynolds, OR, where meeting the state's requirements for a Certificate of Initial Mastery is a high school graduation requirement.

The emphasis on state tests is not universally viewed in a positive light by district staff. For example, some teachers and local administrators in Oregon question the heavy emphasis on state assessments, particularly with the attention to cutoff scores. Many fear that the focus is shifting from the progress students make in the learning process to an arbitrary number on the statewide criterion-referenced test. However, districts are working toward high student performance on the assessments. Schools in the Salem-Keizer district are trying off-year testing to provide information for teachers to plan for accountability testing.

Alignment of district assessments with state assessments is also an important activity in preparing for the implementation of education reform. In some cases, districts have worked toward alignment by providing professional development that addresses the assessment of state standards. In Bay District, FL, initial efforts in assessment alignment began through a Goals 2000 grant to train volunteer teachers to develop performance assessments linked to the new Sunshine State Standards. After several years of this program, district officials made the training mandatory for all 1,400 teachers in the district. Similarly, in Saline, MI, teachers are working on an authentic assessment project, designing new assessments aligned with state standards and assessments for all district grade-level outcomes.

Respondents at some sites voiced concern about the extent of alignment across assessment measures, particularly for districts that have been proactive in implementing education reform. In Nevada, where the state has been using the TerraNova but is still developing assessments linked to its new standards, the Douglas County school district has already made extensive use of its own performance-based assessments. District representatives voice concern about the potential for mismatch between the state's upcoming criterion-referenced test and district assessments.

In the districts studied, respondents described a growing understanding of the importance of using data and monitoring progress toward a more data-driven system. For instance, some districts use data to monitor teacher effectiveness and provide them with feedback, as well as to monitor the effectiveness of professional learning opportunities. In Kentucky, respondents from one district reported that individual teacher Professional Growth Plans are tied to teacher professional development choices, performance evaluations, and analyses of student work.

Personnel in Thompson Valley, CO, emphasized the importance of using data to determine teachers' understanding of standards and to plan professional development accordingly, calling this "checking the oil of the system." Thompson Valley teachers are evaluated based on locally developed professional standards for teachers, one of which is linked to student achievement. Data are collected about teacher evaluation and student achievement and used to structure district actions. For example, teacher performance reviews are frequently used to identify and target professional development needs.

Oldham County, KY, district respondents emphasized the importance of planning and documenting students' progress toward achievement goals. Each school in the district completes a consolidated plan, as well as an Evidence File — an accumulation of lesson plans, student work samples, analyses of both, and other sources of information about progress on each activity in the plan. These internal data supplement school-level performance data collected by the state and the district to provide information to educators about their practice. These data help educators analyze and focus reform efforts in an ongoing improvement process. The district recommended that teachers learn how to work with data and that they be trained to know (1) what students need to be able to demonstrate and (2) how to fully analyze student products to diagnose students' needs so they can plan accordingly.

In Douglas County, NV, school-level site accountability committees, established in 1994, evaluate activities and make modifications in curriculum, instruction, professional development, and resource allocation. This process is based on an extensive analysis of student data, including district Achievement Level Tests and the state-administered TerraNova. Aurora, CO, respondents noted that "bodies of evidence," which are accumulated to demonstrate student learning, highlight the importance of multiple measures of learning and performance assessments.

In O'ahu, HI, the district requires schools to annually submit improvement plans, which are subjected to critical review and evaluated using common rubrics and performance criteria across the district. Rubrics have been put online to facilitate easy access and information sharing across the district and with the state department of education. According to the superintendent, such work is intended to support schools in self-study processes related to accreditation, accountability, and school improvement, within the context of low state-level capacity to administer assessments or provide oversight.

Personnel from Nashua, NH, noted that management of data is important, particularly as a key to understanding the impact of instructional change. They highlighted the complexity of diagnosing and reporting data, as well as the need for a long-term perspective in building data sets to identify trends and support outcomes.

Socorro, TX, has used external funds to develop a mentoring program linked to the Texas standards. Mentors, who are master teachers, provide assistance in standards implementation (e.g., instructional planning and reviewing student work) and help different campuses use data (e.g., item analysis, data disaggregation) to guide instructional improvement plans.

District efforts to move forward with assessment practices are affected by state accountability assessments. Hence, district respondents expressed concern about whether their assessment measures align with those of the state. Some districts have provided professional development activities for staff around assessment practices linked with state measures. Alignment is key if student assessment data are used to diagnose district progress toward learning goals and to document district successes.

In conclusion, these districts reported using assessment data to develop and monitor school improvement, teacher performance, and professional development for teachers. Districts also reported attending to the alignment between district and state assessments. Many of these districts

are involved in intensive professional development in constructing and administering assessments and interpreting and using data.

IMPROVING INSTRUCTION

- *The primary approach to improving instruction is the provision of focused professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators.*
- *A considerable investment of resources (time and money) in professional development must be made before results can be seen.*
- *Some districts are making changes in district structures (such as schedules and the allocation of support staff) to bolster needed changes in instruction.*

The primary way in which districts addressed instructional change is by providing professional learning opportunities for their staff. Respondents noted that learning about these complex reforms required a considerable investment of time and money, and that payoffs defined in terms of increased student achievement may take time to realize. Additionally, some districts have implemented structural changes designed to improve instruction and better align instructional strategies with standards, although these changes are still in preliminary stages.

Knapp (1997) asserts that opportunities for standards-based professional development should be engaging, intellectually challenging, ongoing, and respectful of educators as professionals, such as teachers' participating in scoring student assessments, deliberating about textbook adoptions, or using replacement units. Bodilly and Berends (1999) found a strong positive correlation between reform implementation and the amount of money a district dedicated to professional development and teacher planning. Consistent with these research findings, district respondents described a need to invest considerable time and money in professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators in order for standards-based instruction to become a reality in their districts.

District respondents in Kentucky, Texas, and Colorado described a link between the resources spent on teacher professional development and the extent of standards-based classroom instruction. In Thompson Valley, CO, the superintendent noted that he had seen many districts that were unwilling to invest in instructional improvement, but that the Thompson Valley district had learned that quality professional development was necessary in order to bring about systemic change. The district invests in an early-release day each week for teachers for instructional planning or professional development activities aligned with district goals.

In Kentucky, one respondent recommended that districts allocate significant resources for professional development and that they give schools the autonomy to determine how to spend those resources. In Socorro, TX, respondents noted that districts need to spend more time developing teachers' understanding about standards-based instruction so they are better equipped to implement it in the classroom. In Reynolds, OR, the importance of providing time and resources to provide high-quality professional development was similarly highlighted. District respondents recommended

that professional learning opportunities be supported by ongoing peer coaching, modeling, and mentoring. Similar recommendations about teacher learning opportunities emerged from the Nashua, NH, district.

The need for considerable time and support to learn about the reforms was echoed by one Kentucky respondent, who noted, "You can't do professional development four days in a row and say 'We're done.' You learn by putting things in practice and seeing what you've done. Having the Instructional Support Services team focus on small pieces of professional development on an ongoing basis is how it really works." In Aurora, CO, one example of this type of investment in time was described in terms of replacing one-shot in-service trainings with peer coaching and mentoring strategies, as well as activities organized around modeling best practices. Teachers in the district were described as active participants in learning who demonstrate their knowledge through performance.

Education reforms have broad implications for changes in classroom instruction. Learning about these changes and then being able to put them into place takes time, according to district respondents. The director of instruction in the Bay District, FL, noted, "Two years into standards reform and intensive training shows us that many teachers still don't have a clue about how to teach to standards."

Consistent with other research on implementation (Shields, Knapp, & Wechsler, 1995), some districts emphasized learning opportunities for administrators as well as teachers. For example, the O'ahu, HI, superintendent reported that support structures, including peer mentoring strategies, have been implemented for principals, whom she described as school instructional leaders and the "lighthouses" of the site-based management system. San Francisco, CA, respondents reported that the district provides monthly staff development programs for school principals that focus on leadership strategies, research and practice in implementing standards, and effective instructional tools and methods for teachers. Bay District, FL, administrators were provided with professional development in aligning curriculum, assessments, and instruction beginning in 1997. District respondents reported an increasing emphasis since that time on preparing principals. In the 1998–99 school year, district principals and assistant principals took part in mandatory study groups around a variety of issues, such as standards, student achievement data, state accountability structures, and support for teachers in implementing standards in the classroom.

To support professional learning opportunities, a number of districts reported that they had hired staff or reallocated staff positions (e.g., curriculum specialists, teachers on special assignment, certified National Center for Education and the Economy [NCEE] trainers, and other personnel assigned to provide technical assistance on a variety of issues) to provide support for teachers to learn about reforms. Other structural changes designed to help teachers learn included the alignment of teacher evaluation plans with student achievement goals (as was the case in Oldham County, KY, and Thompson Valley, CO), the reorganization of schedules to create common planning times for teachers (as in Saline, MI), and additional release time to work toward district or school goals (Shelby, MO, and Thompson Valley, CO).

Structural changes to support all students in meeting high standards included developing alternate schedules and supplemental course offerings, as well as experimental approaches to

alternate grading systems. The San Francisco, CA, school district offered students opportunities for extended tutoring, after-school activities, summer school, or enriched/special curricula. Similarly, the Aurora, CO, district is beginning between-semester sessions for students who need remediation. The district also is considering a year-round calendar. Currently, five district elementary schools and one middle school operate on a year-round schedule. In terms of alternate reporting, the Bay County, FL, district has developed a study group to experiment with changes in grading and reporting that reflect the district's standards-based curriculum.

In summary, the districts invest large amounts of time and other resources for professional development focused on improving instruction. Administrators also participate in professional development, which helps them gain the skills they need to be effective instructional leaders. In addition, district structures, such as new positions and schedules, are created and implemented as needed to support instructional goals.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- *Consistent, supportive leadership focused on improving learning is important for sustaining progress in the implementation of education reform.*
- *One important role for leadership is communicating reform goals to different constituencies.*
- *Reform efforts are enhanced by a school culture that is characterized by the values of collaboration, shared responsibility for student learning, and high expectations for all.*

Knowledgeable, consistent leadership support is described in the literature as a key element of building organizational capacity. It is frequently pivotal in the implementation of reform, both at the district level and the school level. At the district level, leadership involves communicating ongoing commitment to the reform effort to a variety of parties (Bodilly & Berends, 1999). Sustained, committed leadership at the district and school level is an element that can enable reform to take root over time (Bodilly, Keltner, Purnell, Reichardt, & Schuyler, 1998; Bodilly & Berends, 1999).

In San Francisco, CA, the associate superintendent highlighted the importance of leaders demonstrating their ongoing commitment to reform, particularly in the face of complex reforms that take time to implement. She recommended that district leaders "stay the course" and work on communication and capacity building among teachers and administrators. In Nashua, NH, representatives noted that sustained focus, ongoing use of data for formative feedback, and patience are important, since people tend to tire or lose interest if outcomes are not readily realized.

This theme of sustained commitment was echoed in other districts, particularly in Douglas County, NV, where the superintendent has led the reform effort since 1992, and the board, despite

changes in membership, has continued to support the effort. The superintendent emphasized that "the continuity of leadership through the process is critical." In Reynolds, OR, the even longer tenures of the superintendent and curriculum specialist in the district (13 years each) have provided stability to the reform effort and allowed the district to hire qualified leaders who have high credibility with teachers. Respondents from six districts explicitly reported that continuity in leadership over several years contributed to reform progress. In those districts where leadership changed frequently, respondents reported that this change had a stalling effect on the reform process.

Districts reported that one important role of leadership was to communicate the district's instructional focus on standards to internal and external constituents and to work to build community support and understanding. According to the superintendent of Thompson Valley schools, CO, the lay community understands standards to mean "work harder," not "work differently."

In Harford County, MD, respondents reported that they had learned about the importance of communication with the school board. They recommended that strong communication structures and close working ties be established so the board can remain focused on student achievement and understand other issues related to implementation, such as the need for teacher planning time. Respondents stressed the importance of involving the board in selecting and adopting instructional programs, developing a vision around standards, and developing strategies to achieve that vision.

In Socorro, TX, parent opposition to instructional change was addressed by involving parents in special programs designed to help them understand their children's learning experiences and to give parents materials to use with their children at home. Another avenue for outreach is the district mobile science laboratory, which visits each school and shares hands-on math and science lessons with parents and community members. Finally, the district redesigned its student report cards to reflect the individual student's cumulative growth.

Within districts, cultural norms and values play a part in the implementation of education reform. Many district respondents reported that they have worked to build such communities around reform. The superintendent of Thompson Valley, CO, reported that he has made a conscious effort to establish good relationships among teachers and district office staff. He has provided compensation for extra work or professional development because he believes establishing trusting relationships is a precursor to instructional change. Similarly, district respondents from O'ahu, HI, described efforts to build positive relationships in the district. They characterized the roles of central office and administrative personnel as partners and critical allies of schools and teachers, rather than as compliance monitors, and described the superintendent's position as one of "support to schools," rather than as one of power.

Teachers from the Batesville, AR, school district described an increase in honest and open dialogue about curriculum. In addition, professional development has shifted from a few discrete, topic-oriented workshops to more professional development days dedicated to curriculum reform and the achievement of district goals. In Hawaii, teacher buy-in was encouraged by asking teachers to assume responsibility for professional development. District respondents reported that shifting from mandated participation in professional development to voluntary participation resulted in professional development being viewed more positively than in the past. In addition, teachers and principals have more fully embraced their role as the drivers of reform in their buildings.

Respondents reported that most educators have put the rhetoric of "all children" into practice by embracing strategies that help ensure that all children learn.

The theme of broadly shared buy-in, high expectations, and widespread communication around common learning goals is echoed across other districts. For instance, in Barren County, KY, one respondent reported, "It takes everybody. Everyone must perceive they can do it. The perceptions students hold for teachers, teachers have of administrators, and central office administrators hold for principals must be high." One Colorado district respondent reported that the district has invested heavily in developing relationships with staff and creating channels for communication. For example, the district has funded a full-time release for the local teachers' union president, who serves as a liaison between the union and the district, organizing regular meeting times. In addition, the district supports teachers with financial backing when possible, and has put a performance incentive plan into place for teachers. The district human resources director reported, "When you get teacher buy-in, you can accomplish a lot because you share a common vision."

Clarifying the vision may require revisiting it regularly, but time spent in this way may help ensure that a common understanding of standards develops across the district. For example, one Colorado official emphasized the importance of revisiting the "why are we doing this" discussion frequently. Ensuring that teachers and staff believe in what they are doing and know the objectives of reform makes it more likely that educators in the district are working toward the same purposes.

Allocating and Using Resources

- *One way to provide resources for reform is to creatively reallocate existing funds.*
- *Actively pursuing external funds is a useful strategy for supplementing district resources.*

Research about implementation indicates that the amount of resources (i.e., time, money, and support staff) spent in support of staff learning about reform is related to the extent of implementation, largely in terms of teachers' support and understanding of education reform (Berends, 2000; Shields et al., 1995; Spillane, Thompson, Lubienski, Jita, & Reimann, 1995). Respondents from the districts studied indicated that the districts have invested considerable amounts of time and money in professional development (described more fully earlier, in the section entitled "Improving Instruction"). Within a generally tight funding context, this meant that districts needed to either actively pursue external resources (e.g., grants, state-provided technical assistance, or other external training opportunities) or creatively reallocate current resources. Internal reallocation strategies most frequently involved reconfiguring staffing patterns.

District respondents reported investing in professional development opportunities in a number of ways, including offering teacher stipends for summer workshops, course credit for participating teachers, and certification of teachers as trainers in external programs, such as the National Center for Education and the Economy effort in Batesville, AR. Additionally, support in the form of in-district professional development positions was a common expense in many of these

districts. Finally, a few districts (e.g., Thompson Valley, CO) reported changing schedules to maximize teacher planning time through early-release days and other strategies.

In some cases, districts actively pursued external funds or technical assistance to support reform implementation. Federal funds from programs such as Title I and Goals 2000 monies were targeted and used by a number of districts (e.g., Harford County, MD, Batesville, AR, Salem-Keizer, OR, and Bay County, FL) to further professional development around reform activities. Additionally, resources from large-scale federal grants were used to supplement district resources. For example, Socorro, TX, district used funds from the National Science Foundation's Urban Systemic Initiative (USI) to align curriculum and demonstration lessons with Texas assessments and standards.

Districts acquired external technical assistance through a variety of partnerships. For instance, in Batesville, AR, schools worked on the alignment of curriculum and assessment with standards through a partnership led by NCEE. Thompson Valley schools in Colorado worked with the Northwest Evaluation Association to develop its certified high school diploma program, which required the development of exit outcomes and aligned curriculum. The central O'ahu district in Hawaii used guidance from New Zealand in standards and curriculum writing.

State initiatives, such as the Kentucky Distinguished Educator program, helped provide resources and expertise to some districts. In Maryland, the Harford County school district used state performance award money to fund whole-school reform models (e.g., the Co-NECT model), although funds also were gathered from the state technology challenge grants. Other state- and national-level resources for professional development included work with the state Board of Collaborative Educational Services (Thompson Valley, CO), the Literacy Learning Network (Aurora, CO), and work with the regional education laboratories.

Local businesses and organizations also provided external resources for districts to support reform. In one of the more innovative district-business partnerships described, the Saline, MI, district reported that in its effort to use the principles of Total Quality Management in professional development for administrators, it had used trainers from a local hospital and from Ford Motor Company. In Aurora, CO, the district developed the Aurora Education Foundation to support professional development, and also raised funds by charging admission to its professional development school and by offering district professional development to surrounding districts for a fee.

These districts were characterized by creative reallocation of internal resources to support reform efforts as well. Most frequently, this internal reallocation involved restructuring staff positions so that personnel were organized to support professional development in the district. Sometimes this entailed reorganizing teachers' responsibilities to cover staff development. For example, in Thompson Valley, CO, the district identified a group of teachers from every school to serve as Standards-Based Education Facilitators. These teachers received one release day per month, shared their work on standards with one another, and served as teacher leaders throughout schools. In other cases, districts used resources to fund professional development positions. In Oldham County, KY, the district hired two Kentucky Distinguished Educators and a writing resource teacher to serve as an Instructional Support Services Team. This team provides training and technical assistance for building-level educators. In O'ahu, HI, the reconfiguration of staff involved relocating

widely dispersed professional development and literacy specialists back into the central office to provide support for all district schools as they adopted the reform.

One strategy that districts used to prepare for resource allocation was to examine total funding from different sources as a single pool of money, According to respondents, this facilitated the alignment of funds around reform efforts. For instance, in Socorro, TX, district officials combined resources from the USI grant, Title I, and special education funding to support the development of mathematics and science standards and whole-school reading and literacy efforts. Harford County, MD, and Douglas County, NV, both worked to consolidate their funding streams with outside assistance so that district goals could be more easily supported. In San Francisco, CA, a similar consolidation of resources also led to consolidation of other efforts, including school planning processes.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The districts described here used different approaches to implement education reform. As expected because of the selection process, they all have engaged in extensive work to develop or adopt standards, assessments of standards, curriculum aligned with standards, and instructional practices to teach standards-based content. They have found creative ways to provide professional development, particularly to fund the time and learning opportunities for teachers and administrators to understand reform goals and practices.

Respondents described different ways in which state policy context affected their approaches. Depending on where the district was prior to state policy enactment, district approaches were modified or guided by state policies about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development. State policies in some settings constrained or redirected district actions. Accountability pressures were seen as increasing district focus on student performance. Additionally, work on alignment was reported to be driven by state assessments, sometimes taking precedence over alignment with standards.

District respondents reported that sometimes the state focus on accountability had provided them with a needed focus for their own reform efforts, although this was not universally the case. Alignment was reported to be an area of substantial work — alignment between district assessments and state assessments as well as between local curricula, assessments, and standards. Respondents reported that districts use student achievement on state assessments to monitor student progress, evaluate teacher professional development, guide program activities, and assess district progress toward implementation of the reforms.

The primary approach to improving instruction was developing professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators. District respondents noted that a considerable investment of time and money in professional development opportunities is necessary for educators to fully learn about and be able to implement reform. A variety of support strategies were incorporated into district approaches, including mentoring structures, use of teacher leaders, and ongoing coaching of teachers in classrooms. In a few districts, structural changes helped improve

instruction through professional development; specifically, professional development staff were hired and schedules changed to give teachers additional or common planning time.

Consistent, supportive leadership focused on the success of reforms was reported by district respondents as highly important to local implementation efforts, particularly because reforms require considerable time to understand and put into place. An important role described for leaders is to clearly communicate the reform vision to district personnel and to community members. Respondents also reported that leadership was not necessarily limited to district administrators, since teachers and others provided critical direction and support. Respondents noted the importance of district cultures that are collaborative, emphasize shared responsibility for student learning, and communicate high expectations for all students.

Finally, in light of the significant resources needed to support ongoing learning about education reform, districts used a number of strategies to garner and target resources. First, most district respondents reported actively seeking external funding, including federal and state grants and discretionary funds. Partnerships with local constituencies aided efforts to draw on external funds and expertise. Second, districts have reallocated internal resources to support reform implementation. Often this has meant revising staffing patterns to support professional development. At times, it has entailed scheduling changes to create time for learning and working collaboratively. Finally, some districts report that they have pooled monies from different sources to support reform.

The variety of district-level strategies used to implement reform points to the array of ideas and resources that are needed to carry out this work. In every district studied, reform efforts were extensive, requiring vision, sustained effort, attention to local circumstances, and the strategic use of resources. District efforts were affected and guided by state policy, but state policy was not enough to accomplish the significant work and goals of reform. The ideas described in this report begin to paint a detailed picture of the extent to which state and local efforts can be mutually reinforcing and how district responses to state policies determine the direction and success of reform.

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APPENDIX

Table A1 contains demographic and descriptive statistics for the districts included in this study.

Table A1. Phase 2 School District Demographic and Descriptive Statistics

District	# of Students	Ethnicity	% Children in Poverty	Median Household Income	% English Language Learners	Annual Expenditure per Pupil
Urban (1):						
San Francisco Unified, California	61,340	67% Non-White 33% White	19%	$33,000	9%	$5,078
Large & Mid-Sized Central Cities (5):						
Bay County, Florida	24,802	19% Non-White 81% White	20%	$25,000	1%	$4,828
Nashua, New Hampshire	12,447	6% Non-White 94% White	9%	$41,000	1%	$5,122
Salem-Keizer, Oregon	28,863	11% Non-White 89% White	15%	$27,000	2%	$5,502
Socorro Independent, Texas	18,821	21% Non-White 79% White	34%	$24,000	11%	$4,763
Thompson, Colorado	13,137	5% Non-White 95% White	9%	$32,000	0%	$4,354
Suburban (5):						
Aurora, Colorado	27,421	26% Non-White 74% White	13%	$31,000	1%	$5,122
Central O'ahu[1], Hawaii	31,550	65% Non-White 35% White	10%	$21,600	4%	$5,000
Harford, Maryland	35,956	13% Non-White 87% White	6.7%	$42,000	0.4%	$5,658
Reynolds, Oregon	7,760	11% Non-White 89% White	11%	$30,000	1%	$5,191
Saline, Michigan	3951	4% Non-White 96% White	3.3%	$52,000	0.2%	$5,938

District	# of Students	Ethnicity	% Children in Poverty	Median Household Income	% English Language Learners	Annual Expenditure per Pupil
Rural and Small Towns (5):						
Barren County, Kentucky	3,305	NA	NA	NA	NA	$4,786
Batesville, Arkansas	2,236	6% Non-White 94% White	14%	$21,000	NA	$4,016
Douglas County, Nevada	7,031	7% Non-White 93% White	8%	$35,000	1%	$5,097
Oldham County, Kentucky	7,395	4% Non-White 96% White	7%	$38,000	1%	$4,077
Shelby R-IV Schools, Missouri	937	1% Non-White 99% White	18.5%	$19,000	0%	$4,017

Note. Information obtained from the Web site of the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Education Finance Statistics Center: www.nces.ed.gov/edfin. Data reflect FY1995 Common Core Data reported to the U.S. Government. Geographical categories are based on Bureau of Census classifications. NA designates information that is not available.

[1]Data regarding Central O'ahu sub-district of Hawaii Public School District was obtained from the sub-district itself because Common Core Data does not report statistics at the sub-district level.

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